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ABSTRACT

In this report, the Vermont State Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights argues that at all levels of the educational system in Vermont, there is need for increased awareness and sensitivity to the need for education on human relations. Educators must become aware of the importance of this need even though Vermont has a recial and ethnic minority of less than one-half of one percent. State Advisory Committee members who met with representatives of the State Department of Education left with the impression that the Department had good intentions, but no authority or funds to plan or implement programs in the area of human relations. Since 50 percent of Vermont's teachers are trained in Vermont colleges, there is obvious need for instruction in the area of human relations and minority groups. The Burlington branch of the NAACP is the only one of the three organizations interviewed by the State Committee that is actively working with schools on the need for multi-racial, multi-ethnic education. Committee members felt that the Vermont Educational Association was the only educational organization aware of the need for education in Vermont concerning human rights and minority groups. (Author/JM)

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CLOSING THE ETHNIC GAP

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Report of the
Vermont State Advisory Committee to the
U. S. Commission on Civil Rights
Prepared for the Information and
Consideration of the Commission

May 1973

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TO THE

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*Was Acting Chairperson of the Committee at the time the project was initiated.

PREFACE

The United States Commission on Civil Rights

The United States Commission on Civil Rights, created by the Civil Rights Act of 1957, is an independent, bipartisan agency of the executive branch of the Federal Government. By the terms of the Act, as amended, the Commission is charged with the following duties pertaining to denials of the equal protection of the laws based on race, color, sex, religion, or national origin: investigations of individual discriminatory denials of the right to vote; study of legal developments with respect to denials of the equal protection of the law; appraisal of the laws and policies of the United States with respect to denials of equal protection of the law; maintenance of a national clearinghouse for information respecting denials of equal protection of the law; and investigation of patterns or practices of fraud or discrimination in the conduct of Federal elections. The Commission is also required to submit reports to the President and the Congress at such times as the Commission, the Congress, or the President shall deem desirable.

The State Advisory Committee

An Advisory Committee to the United States Commission on Civil Rights has been established in each of the 50 States and the District of Columbia pursuant to section 105(c) of the Civil Rights Act of 1957 as amended. The Committees are made up of responsible persons who serve without compensation. Their functions under their mandate from the Commission are to: advise the Commission of all relevant information concerning their respective States on matters within the jurisdiction of the Commission; advise the Commission on matters of mutual concern in the preparation of reports of the Commission to the President and the Congress; receive reports, suggestions, and recommendations from individuals, public and private organizations, and public officials upon matters pertinent to inquiries conducted by the State Committee; initiate and forward advice and recommendations to the Commission upon matters in which the Commission shall request the assistance of the State Committee; and attend, as observers, any open hearing or conference which the Commission may hold within the State.

Recommendations to the United States Commission on Civil Rights

This report was submitted to the United States Commission on Civil Rights by the Vermont State Advisory Committee. The conclusions and recommendations in this report are those of the Committee and are based upon its evaluation of information received during January 1972 through August 1972. This report has been received by the Commission and will be considered by it in making its reports and recommendations to the President and the Congress.

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INTRODUCTION

In the fall of 1972, the Vermont State Advisory Committee to the United States Commission on Civil Rights was reactivated and reorganized, and met to discuss possible areas of involvement. The Committee members agreed that they would focus on the education received by students in Vermont. Their goal was to learn what is being done by the educational system of the State to foster improved human relations and understanding of the multi-racial, multi-ethnic world in which we live.

Why did the Committee decide to focus on schools? Many educators agree that education is one way to begin to eradicate the problems of prejudice and racism, and the myths and stereotypes ascribed to minority people.

> The school is the most important public institution bearing on the child's development as an informed, educated person and as a human being with hope for the future. It represents the single most important opportunity afforded to society to interrupt the endless cycle of poverty and, above all, to heal the great social divisions that trouble the Nation. For children of white, affluent society as well as for minorities, integrated education is essential if they are to thrive in the multi-racial world they will enter and help redeem America's promise, which school children each day are asked to recite and believe in... 'one Nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.'1/

1/ Statement, U. S. Commission on Civil Rights concerning the President's message to Congress and proposed legislation on busing and equal education opportunities, p. 15.

The Committee decided that there would be value in a survey by a group of laymen who are not experts in the field of education, but who represent a cross-section of the citizens of Vermont. The project involved the gathering and careful review of information by residents of the State, and does not purport to be an exhaustive study. It is a general overview, and is intended as such.

The topic was divided into four main areas: The State Department of Education, teachers and teacher training, public and private organizations with concerns in this area, and educational associations. Committee members conducted personal interviews, researched material relevant to their particular areas, and delivered reports to the entire Vermont Committee. This report summarizes that information and concludes with a series of recommendations by the Committee.

Staff assistance on this project was provided to the Committee by Marsha C. Macey, Consultant to the Commission. In addition, the Committee acknowledges the contribution of Marna Chater of Cabot and Joan Webster of Plainfield.

PROBLEM

Vermont, with a racial and ethnic minority population of less than one-half of 1 percent, is caught in a pattern of racial isolation. Living in a predominantly white environment does not protect Vermont children from the prejudice and racism dividing this country. In fact, this kind of background may serve to reinforce stereotypes and myths, particularly if they go unchallenged by an educational system that fails to provide knowledge of the contributions of all Americans, regardless of color or ethnic origin.

> The American ideals of equality, freedom, God-given dignity of the individual, inalienable rights on the one hand, against practices of discrimination, humiliation, insult, and denial of opportunity to Negroes on the other are an 'American Dilemma'.2/

This moral dilemma touches every community in the State of Vermont, whether or not there are minority residents.

> ...the gap between creed and deed in American life with regard to racial and other forms of group discrimination contributes to the weakening of the moral tone of America...and doubtless contributes to the flabbiness of moral codes in other important areas... the consequences of this 'American Dilemma" are that American life functions in the constant shadow of a patent evasion of a major moral imperative. The child growing up in such a culture is faced with a constant reminder that creeds are one thing, deeds another, and that the adult world, to a large degree, countenances this hypocrisy.3/

2/ Mydral, Gunnar, An American Dilemma, N.Y.: Harper & Co., 1944.
3/ Gordon, Milton M., and Roche, John P., "Segregation--Two-Edged Sword", New York Times, April 25, 1944.

Still another effect of racial isolation is the distorted sense of reality the Vermont child may develop in a white-centered world. This is not the reality of the modern world which is multi-racial and multi-ethnic, but the illusion of a white milieu. Such a narrow environment makes it difficult, if not impossible, for the white-centered child to deal adequately with normal human and social relations outside this situation. It is not likely that the Vermont child of today will grow up and continue to live in small isolated communities, with present population projections for the State, the highly mobile society in which we live, and the job situation that is peculiar to Vermont.

> Children who develop this way (white-centered) are robbed of opportunities for emotional and intellectual growth, are limited in basic development of self so that they cannot accept darker pigmented people. Such persons are severely handicapped in a complex, interactive, multi-ethnic world, undergoing inter-group tension and conflict.4/

This is, indeed, a Vermont problem, and the Committee's aim was to find out what programs, if any, the educational system of the State was carrying out or planning in order to broaden the world view of Vermont students.

4/ Citron, Abraham, The Rightness of Whiteness, Michigan-Ohio Regional Education Laboratory, 1969, p. 2.

FINDINGS

Vermont State Department of Education

Committee members initially met with (then) Commissioner of Education Joseph Oakey in the Commissioner's office in January 1972. The Commissioner assured them of the cooperation of the Department and reiterated its emphasis on the development of each Vermont student as an individual. Karlene Russell, Director of Elementary and Secondary Education; Madge Boardman, Chief, Elementary Curriculum; and Don McCafferty, Chief, Secondary Curriculum were also interviewed. Following is a summary of the various topics discussed:

A. Textbooks and teaching materials

The State Department of Education distributes State and Federal funds to the 52 local school districts (Unions) and provides assistance in program development if it is requested. The Department does not have consultants in the various disciplines (mathematics, English, art, etc.) to provide services at the local level. Since the supervisory Unions receive 70 percent of their funding from the local property taxes, they have almost total autonomy.

Textbooks for both elementary and secondary schools are selected by curriculum coordinators in each of the 52 supervisory districts. Each district is contacted individually by salesmen and final decisions are made by the school superintendent. No uniform book codes exist. While there are excellent texts which reflect concern in the area of

human relations, the State Department of Education can only recommend and advise. Power to choose ultimately rests with each individual superintendent.

Additional teaching materials are available on request from five Action Centers. The Centers, funded by Title III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (HEW), are set up to provide workshops and seminars for teachers and to be a source of innovative teaching materials. Each is locally controlled, and it's services and focus depend on the individual superintendent. The usual library lists of materials about minority groups are available, but seem limited and out-of-date. There appears to be no material on minorities and human relations as a regular part of on-going programs at the Action Centers.

In September 1969 the State Department of Education presented a seminar for educators, "The Importance of the Negro in American History: Classroom Tools for the Vermont Teacher." In March 1970 the Department sponsored an in-service training session on integrating Afro-American contributions into the English and social studies curriculum. During that same month the Vermont Council on Social Studies, the Vermont Council of Teachers of English, and the Vermont Intermediate Teachers Association conducted a joint presentation at the Vermont Education Association convention to help teachers implement elements of Black Studies into the regular curriculum.

The Department owns 25 films on race relations made in 1965 by the Lincoln -Filene Center of Tufts University. These are available for use by schools on request.

B. Innovative Programs Planned

At the present time, the State Department of Education has a proposal under study to change the Action Centers into self-governing action/renewal centers accountable to a State Advisory Council, rather than operated on a local, individual basis as is now the case. Such a coordinated program would make it possible to include information and materials about human relations and minority groups in a uniform way. However, there is no funding presently available for this project.

The Department also has under discussion, but with no plans for immediate implementation, a model program dealing with minority groups which would be available to local schools at their request. It also has plans for a traveling in-service training program for teachers. There are also plans to broadcast educational programs to schools on cable T.V., with 65 tracks to be available by 1976. This could be another area to include information about minority groups.

C. Parochial Schools

In addition to meeting with staff members of the Vermont State Department of Education, Committee members interviewed Monsignor Lynch, Superintendent of the Parochial Schools of Vermont. In matters of curricula and textbooks, each parochial school is autonomous. Rice Memorial High School in Burlington, the largest parochial school in the State, includes a unit on the Black man in history and a unit on Black literature

in its curriculum. The school has purchased audio-visual materials which deal with topics of human relations and minority groups, although, no new textbooks have been purchased in five years. In conjunction with Burlington High School a joint proposal was prepared, but was not funded, to enlarge the Burlington Audio-Visual Center's holdings in the area of minority groups.

Teachers and Teacher Training

There is a yearly turnover of 39 percent of the teaching staff in secondary schools. Approximately 50 percent of the teachers in kindergarten through the 12th grade come from Vermont colleges. The average age of teachers is 27 and less than 1 percent of all teachers are non-white.

Committee members' investigations indicate that the State University System's teacher training institutions are not addressing themselves to the problem at all. With one exception, there do not seem to be any courses directly related to human relations and minority groups. The exception was a course offered free of charge at the University of Vermont in the spring of 1972. The course was developed by Dr. Leon Burrell from his proposal, "A Plan to Make Vermont a Leader in Racial Education." Its major objective was to enable the school staff to become competent in teaching the culture and accomplishments of minorities in an integrated or all-white classroom.

Public and Private Organizations

A. Vermont Commission on Human Rights

The Vermont Commission on Human Rights deals with specific complaints of discrimination and operates through volunteer help on a budget of $1,000 per year. Since its funds are limited, the Commission has no on-going projects or community programs underway or under consideration. However, the Commission will be glad to cooperate in appropriate educational programs with the Vermont State Advisory Committee or other organizations if it is understood that the Commission has no financial resources.

B. National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)

For the past 2 years the Burlington Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People has focused on the need for multi-racial, multi-ethnic education in elementary and secondary schools in the Burlington area. It is working with the Human Relations Committee of the Vermont Education Association, and was involved with Dr. Burrell in the development of his proposal (see p. 8). It appears to be the most active group working in this area of concern.

C. American Civil Liberties Union, Vermont Branch (ACLU)

This is an active organization concerned with civil liberties and civil rights issues. However, it does not plan community-oriented programs. Its role is one of "guardianship" of Constitutional rights and its work largely involves litigation. If appropriate, the ACLU is willing to cooperate with the Vermont State Advisory Committee and other organizations with concerns in this area.

Educational Associations

A. Vermont Education Association (VEA)

The VEA is a statewide teacher organization with 4,000 members and 68 local associations. The membership includes between five and ten black teachers and some Asian Americans and Indians (India). It has a Human Relations Committee under the chairmanship of William Haines. This Committee is working with the NAACP and has met with Dr. Burrell to discuss his proposal. A workshop on minority groups for 60 to 80 teachers is planned.

While the NAACP has provided the VEA with a booklist and information on materials related to human relations and minority groups, Committee members found no indication that this was being used in any of its on-going programs. Mr. Haines expressed interest in continued communication with the Vermont Advisory Committee.

B. Vermont Headmaster's Association

The Vermont Headmaster's Association is a professional organization of secondary school principals that is primarily concerned with inter-scholastic competitions. The Association does not appear to have programs dealing with human relations and minority groups, nor does it seem to have the inclination to explore the matter. Robert Pierce, Executive Director, stated that although the Association consists of high school principals, it does not deal with school curriculum or teaching materials

C. Vermont State School Directors Association

The Vermont State School Directors Association is composed of school board members from 268 local school boards. Although Committee members attempted to meet with Executive Director Charles Nichols, no meeting was held.

CONCLUSIONS

State Department of Education

State Advisory Committee members who met with representatives of the State Department of Education left with the impression that the Department had good intentions, but no authority or funds to plan or implement programs in the area of human relations. The representatives, as examples of their concern in this area, described programs which occurred mainly in 1969 and 1970. There is no long-range planning, on-going programming or utilization of materials and supplementary resources involving human relations and minority groups.

The State Board of Education had adopted a proposal made by former Commissioner of Education, Harvey Scribner, that recognizes the need to incorporate new and revised materials on minority groups into the curricula. However, the responsibility of selecting appropriate materials was delegated to local boards of education (with the local superintendent's approval). The State Department of Education, therefore, is left to operate only in an advisory capacity.

It is possible that a strong Commissioner of Education could have direct influence on local districts, encouraging them to implement programs in this area. The final authority, however, resides in each local district.

Teachers and Teacher Training

Most of the information collected by the State Committee on teacher training related to the State University System. Since 50 percent of Vermont's teachers are trained in Vermont colleges, there is obvious need for instruction in the area of human relations and minority groups to provide the future educators of Vermont with the information necessary to teach adequately the history, culture, achievements, and accomplishments of minorities, and to prepare Vermont students for a multi-racial and multi-ethnic world. Similarly, courses offered for re-certification credits should reflect concern in this area.

Public and Private Organizations

The Burlington Branch of the NAACP is the only one of the three organizations interviewed by the State Committee that is actively working with schools on the need for multi-racial, multi-ethnic education. This kind of community programming does not fall within the function of the ACLU. While its present staff and budget limitations greatly inhibit the Commission on Human Rights from programming in the field of human relations in education, potentially it is a major tool for developing and implementing programs at the elementary, secondary, and higher education levels. The absence of significant numbers of racial minorities in the State has been used to justify the low level of funding for the Commission. Clearly, in preparing Vermont youngsters to live in a multi-ethnic, multi-racial world, there are pressing and unattended program areas where the Human Rights Commission could make an important contribution.

Educational Associations

Committee members felt that the Vermont Educational Association was the only educational organization aware of the need for education in Vermont concerning human rights and minority groups. The VEA has an active Human Rights Committee and has presented programs in this area in the past. It plans a workshop on this topic in 1973.

RECOMMENDATIONS

At all levels of the educational system in Vermont there is need for increased awareness and sensitivity to the need for education on human relations in terms of the multi-racial, multi-ethnic world in which we live. Educators must become aware of the importance of this need even though Vermont has a racial and ethnic minority of less than one-half of 1 percent. Indeed, this makes it imperative that Vermont students, in their schooling, gain knowledge of the multi-racial, multi-ethnic world. As a step toward this goal, the Vermont State Advisory Committee to the U. S. Commission on Civil Rights recommends the following:

1. The State Department of Education should take leadership in this area. One person in the Department should be assigned clear-cut responsibility for all programs in human relations and minority studies. These responsibilities should include, but not be limited to:

   a. Reviewing current programs, textbooks, and curriculum to determine whether they reflect minority contributions to America;

   b. Developing programs in the area of human rights and minority studies;

   c. Aiding and assisting teachers and administrators to evaluate their programs and to develop positive programming in this area;

   d. Reviewing teacher training programs which carry certification by the Department of Education to

determine if the curriculum contains human relations and minority studies, encouraging the development of such courses, and providing assistance when possible;

e. Planning one-day workshops for school superintendents of the State to provide information and resources for programs at the local level in human relations and intercultural education.

f. Planning an annual workshop for the staff in each superintendency with specific responsibility in this area (see recommendation below) which will provide information, resources, and up-dating for programs in human relations and intercultural education at the local level.

2. Each superintendent should propose a staff position, similar to the one proposed for the State Department of Education, with responsibility in the area of human relations and multi-racial, and multi-ethnic education. The responsibilities of this position similarly should include, but not be limited to:

a. Reviewing current programs, textbooks, and present curriculum to ascertain whether they reflect minority history and contributions to America;

b. Developing programs in the area of human rights and minority studies;

c. Working with the State Department of Education in program evaluation and development;

d. Aiding teachers at the local level.

3. The Vermont Commission on Human Rights must be adequately funded and staffed to carry out its responsibilities to act as a resource in the development of positive educational programs. The fact that racial minorities make up less than one percent of the State's population, does not diminish the importance of this recommendation. As pointed out, Vermont exists in a multi-racial, multi-ethnic country and world. The citizens of the State, and particularly the youth, could benefit vastly from an effective and adequately funded Commission on Human Rights.

4. The teacher-training institutions of Vermont must recognize their responsibility to train teachers who are sensitive to and aware of the need for education concerning human relations and the multi-racial, multi-ethnic world. The president of each college or university should designate one person to have clear-cut responsibility for all programs in the area of human relations and minority studies. This person's responsibilities should include, but not be limited to:

a. Reviewing current courses and curriculum to determine if they reflect minority history and contributions to America;

b. Developing programs in the area of human rights and minority studies.